

Estranged Students

The Big Idea

Not all students have a family they can rely on, and those that don't may not have been in care. Some are studying at university without the support, contact, or safety net of their family. These are estranged students.



Estranged students experience of university can be very different from their peers.

What Does “Estranged” Mean?

An estranged student is someone who has no contact with their parents or family, and where that relationship breakdown is irreconcilable. It can happen at different times; some students may arrive at university already estranged, while others may become estranged during their studies.

This usually means:

No emotional support

No financial support

No practical support (like somewhere to stay)

Estrangement is recognised across the UK, but how it is tracked and supported varies:

England: Recognised in Student Finance, but identification can be inconsistent across institutions

Scotland & Wales: Estranged students are typically tracked more consistently in formal returns but may be less embedded in student support systems due to a more extensive populations of care experienced students.



In practice: Estrangement is complex, personal, and often hard to disclose or evidence.

A Growing and Better-Understood Group

As universities improve how they identify and track estrangement:

 The number of estranged students being recorded is increasing

 Awareness is growing across institutions

 More universities are developing targeted support offers



This doesn't necessarily mean estrangement itself is increasing – but that it is becoming more visible and better understood.

Lived Experience

Estranged students may have experienced:

 Family breakdown, conflict, or rejection

 Being asked to leave home or choosing to leave for safety

 Loss of contact with family networks

 Trauma, isolation, or instability

 Navigating life independently at a young age



Many are balancing study with full independence and limited support.

LGBTQ+ Students

There is a significant overlap between estranged students and the LGBTQ+ community.

Some students become estranged because of:

 Their sexual orientation or gender identity

 Lack of acceptance or family rejection

 Unsafe or hostile home environments

This means effective support should be:

Inclusive

Trauma-informed

Aware of intersecting identities

What Support Might Be Missing?

Estranged students often do not have access to:

- 💖 Family financial support or emergency help
- 🏠 A home to return to during holidays
- 📦 Help with moving or setting up accommodation
- ☎️ Trusted adults for advice and advocacy
- 🧠 Consistent emotional support



They may also face barriers in proving estrangement to access support.

Impact On Education

These challenges can have a real impact:

- ⚠️ Higher risk of dropping out
- 💰 Financial instability affecting participation
- 🧠 Increased stress and mental health challenges
- 🚫 Low trust in seeking help



Students are not just managing their studies, they're often managing everything around them too.

Why Housing Is Such A Big Issue

Housing is often the central pressure point. Without a family home, estranged students may face:

- ✗ No accommodation outside term time
- 💰 Expensive or insecure private renting
- 🔑 Barriers like needing a rent guarantor
- ⚠️ Risk of homelessness at key transition points



Housing insecurity isn't just one issue – it affects every part of the student experience.



Continued

What This Means for SU Officers

Understanding estrangement helps you challenge assumptions in your system.

Ask your institution:

? How are estranged students identified – and how easy is that process?

? Are evidence requirements creating barriers?

? How consistently are estranged students tracked?

? Are support services inclusive of LGBTQ+ experiences?

And importantly:

 Amplify student voices

 Highlight where systems assume family support

 Advocate for flexible, visible, and inclusive support

Key Takeaway

This isn't just about family breakdown. It's about:

Independence without a safety net

Systems not designed for that reality

Students navigating university alone



A #HomeAtUniversity means making sure no student is left without a place to belong.